



Technicians' vehicles carried £36K of tools to maintain the convoy



Neurosurgeon Nik, dentist Martin and Dr Mike were always on hand



Camping conditions were far from hospitable, but the mechanics and medical team still had to operate efficiently in case of emergency

MOLAR EXPEDITION

Open wide, this won't hurt a bit... We brace ourselves for an appointment with the dentist – in a Land Rover

Tom Barnard
THE Australian outback, late afternoon. The temperature gauge was showing 44°C. A bright orange Range Rover was parked up, and from inside came the unmistakable sounds of classical music and a dentist's drill. A man lay on the reclined front seat while another, who looked like he had just stepped off the beach, stared into his mouth and poked about vigorously with tools wired up to a small briefcase. We might have been 300 miles from the nearest town, but according to dentist Martin Jörgens, this was the perfect place to perform a root canal operation and a complicated front tooth filling.

Martin was the official dentist for the Land Rover G4 Challenge, the recently completed globe-trotting adventure dreamed up to promote the company's rugged 4x4s. And since the 16 competitors plus 100 support crew and media – including Auto Express – were travelling to the remotest places around the world to complete gruelling tasks, they had to be prepared for any medical emergency. "It's not so difficult," said Martin, a dentist with 14 years' experience and a veteran of several previous Land Rover adventures. "I roll the front seat right back, then make the patient lie down and get comfortable. I set the air-conditioning, plug my equipment into the cigar lighter and turn the music on before climbing into the back to perform the operation."

The work he does isn't just temporary first aid, either – it's as good as any treatment at his surgery in Düsseldorf, Germany. This is possible because of a £30,000 box of tricks that looked for all the world like a plain aluminium briefcase. Developed for military mobile hospitals, it even included Martin's favourite laser wand, a piece of kit so sophisticated it's usually found only in large dental surgeries back home. After Martin had successfully restored the toothy grin of Turkish competitor Cuneyt Gazioglu, there were plenty of other G4 adventurers queuing up to get the treatment – if only to avoid huge dental bills later.

Martin was part of the G4 Challenge's three-strong medical team, which aimed to ensure everyone taking part in or reporting on the event would be better cared for out in the desert than they would be at home. Just ask Canadian competitor Jim Kuhn, who picked up gruesome lacerations to his left elbow, right wrist and left knee during a high-speed tumble off his mountain bike in a remote part of the South African leg.

He was in the back of the specially converted Defender ambulance and was treated within six minutes of the accident – surprising since he had



Mechanic Pete led the maintenance team

been half-way down a steep, rocky descent at the time. The G4 doctor, Mike Irani, was just the sort of man you'd want looking after you, too. The consultant physician from Chiswick, west London, is a specialist in sports injuries with 30 years' experience, and has been an official team doctor at four Olympic games. After Jim's accident, Mike and his assistant, neurosurgeon Nik Patel from Bristol, ended up transporting him to the nearest motel, where they stitched him back together in a bathroom. "It looked like a scene from the movie Psycho," said Mike. "We had to warn the receptionist or I'm sure she would have called the police."

Getting the contents of a hospital and pharmacy into a few cases isn't easy, so Mike had to plan ahead carefully to predict the possible injuries and try to cater for every eventuality. "I started researching more than a year ago, checking the climates, time changes, camp locations

and the tasks competitors would be set. I could predict the likely problems, from fatigue and dehydration to hygiene issues, snake bites and even exposure, as the temperatures on the trip vary between -20°C in New York to 44°C in Australia." Mike also checked out the nearest hospital to all the challenge locations, but knew most of the time he would have to rely on the Land Rover and the equipment it could carry. Luckily, three of the Defender ambulances – all painted the distinctive shade of G4 orange – were built specially, with one sent to each country where the event took place: America, South Africa and Australia. They were all designed to Mike's specifications,

with specialist equipment such as a stretcher carrier, fridge and gas canisters. Communications were also vital, so the Defenders were wired up with two radios and a satellite phone capable of calling from anywhere in the world.

But an ambulance is no good if it breaks down or gets stranded on the way to an emergency, so it was permanently tailed by a Discovery kitted out as a mobile garage and manned by Land Rover's most experienced mechanics. Headed by workshop supervisor Pete Melling, the team built the 154 cars used in the Challenge, and had to maintain them in areas and conditions which were a far cry from a spotless service bay.

In addition, each Discovery was equipped with £36,000 worth of top-of-the-line Snap-On tools and a £4,500 diagnostic computer. After one team managed to drown a Range Rover by opening a door while the 4x4 was up to its windscreen in

water, the mechanics worked through the night to get it dried out. Later, and with no special lifts to help out, a rear suspension problem was sorted by borrowing a local farmer's forklift truck to raise the back wheels off the ground.

Like the doctors, Pete and his team had to select essential parts to carry with them, but also had a direct link to Land Rover's dealer network to source those unexpectedly needed components – such as a replacement for the damp gearbox computer which had to be flown into the Oz outback.

So will normal life seem a tad dull after travelling around the world to make sure that the G4 Challenge is disaster-free? "Actually, I'm looking forward to getting a tie on again," said Dr Irani. Dentist Martin added: "It will be good to have an espresso machine in the corner of the surgery!" And as for mechanic Pete? "I'm just looking forward to a proper pie and a pint." □



Dentist Martin Jörgens gets to grips with a competitor's toothache while parked up in the Australian outback

Zahnarztpraxis Dr. Martin Jörgens
 Kaiserswerther Markt 25 · 40489 Düsseldorf · Fon 0211-479 00 79 · Fax 0211-479 00 09
 praxisdrjoergens@aol.com · www.drjoergens.de